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Green Living Guidelines

Environmentally friendly building and remodeling has gone mainstream, but what does living green really mean?

By Greg Cook

Energy Star compact fluorescent light bulbs use two-thirds less energy than standard incandescent bulbs to provide the same amount of light. They last up to 10 times longer.



Defining Green

Good news for you, Kermit: It's not that hard being green anymore.

Products claiming green status seem to be popping up all over, and support for the concept has almost become a given. In fact, the only hard part now is pinning down exactly what it means to be green.

Joyce Mason, vice-president of marketing for California's Pardee Homes, has an answer. The company built its first Energy Star home in 1998 and has built 3,000 energy-efficient houses with environmentally friendly materials since 2001. Here's this residential builder's definition of green:

- Minimizes the use of nonrenewable energy, water, and other natural resources.
- Provides a house with a healthy indoor environment built in a community with a healthy outdoor environment.
- Uses products that reduce harmful effects on the environment.
- Controls house size.
- Designs appropriately for the climate zone.
- Treats a house as a system of interrelated components.

The company matches products with these principles in four categories (more to follow on each):

20 Ways to Save Money on Your Fuel Bill

- Energy smart
- Earth smart
- Health smart
- Water smart

Energy-Smart Products

Many products that reduce harmful effects on the environment are on the market now. Often they are simple and inexpensive, offering green benefits whether you're planning to build or remodel. Others are practical only when the cost can be incorporated into a mortgage; this way the upfront cost can be spread over time and made up for in savings on your monthly utility bill. Here's a short list.



- Programmable thermostat
- Compact fluorescent lighting
- Adequate insulation and home sealing
- Energy Star appliances
- Energy-saving home electronics

- Solar water heater
- Tankless water heater
- Energy-efficient windows and doors
- High-efficiency heating and cooling
- Photovoltaic solar cells

Check out these two links, which are excellent Web-based resources to help you find and evaluate energy-smart products.

[Shopping for Energy-Efficient Products](#) [Energy Star Qualified Products](#)

[Federal Tax Credits for Energy Efficiency](#) [Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency](#) [Plus: 10 Tips for Energy Efficiency](#)

For information about federal and state tax credits and rebates for buying and using energy-efficient products, consult the next two sites.

Installing blown-in insulation efficiently fills nooks and crannies in your home.



Earth-Smart Materials

Minimizing the use of nonrenewable resources usually involves the intentional selection of alternative materials in building and remodeling. This is partly behind the upsurge in the popularity of [bamboo](#) flooring, for example. Such products have to be attractive, durable, and reasonably priced to attract attention -- and many companies are working to provide these products. Here are some other examples.

- **Engineered structural wood products** are manufactured from fast-growing trees and recycled wood chips, thus helping to safeguard old-growth forests.
- **Rapidly renewing wood flooring also** protects old-growth forests. Examples include lyptus (a fast-growing eucalyptus that looks like cherry or mahogany), cork, and bamboo.
- **Recycled content carpet**, commonly known as "pop bottle carpet," uses plastic and recovered textiles and is more resilient and colorfast than conventional carpet.
- **Cellulose attic insulation** is made from recycled newspaper and sprayed in for superior sealing.

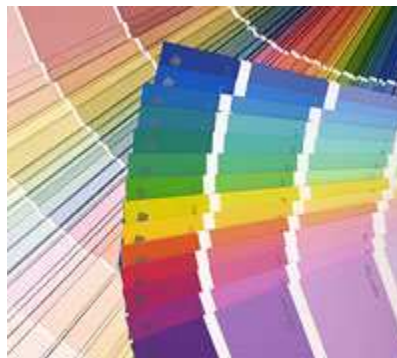
See this Web site for a comprehensive list of earth-smart products.

[Green Building Products in Homebuilding and Remodeling](#)

[Green Home Building Guidelines for Mainstream Builders](#) [Green Building and Remodeling Materials](#) [Eco-Friendly Style for Kitchens and Baths](#)

The [National Association of Home Builders](#) has developed guidelines now used by 15 state and local building programs across the U.S.

Eco-friendly paints, such as Benjamin Moore's Aura Paint, are less harmful to the environment because they release fewer volatile organic compounds than regular paint.



Health-Smart Approaches

One common concern for parents in recent years has been the effect of dust and residue from lead in paint. Radon has also been a big issue. Evidence of how important both of these home health issues has become is that disclosures are now typically required as part of any residential

real estate transaction.

Creating and maintaining a healthy home environment is obviously important for anyone with allergies or heightened sensitivity to noxious odors or pollutants. But today's consumers are becoming more attuned to these issues regardless of special needs, and that's a good thing for everyone. Consider these highly effective product solutions for a healthy home.

- Low- or no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints
- Central dehumidification to reduce mold and mildew
- Central air purification and ventilation systems
- Central-vacuum system
- Flooring that doesn't harbor dust

For a special emphasis about dealing with health hazards that affect children in the home, visit the first Web site listed below.

[National Center for Healthy Housing 10 Steps to Build an Earth-Friendly Home](#)

Front-loading washers are gentler on your clothes and cut water use by half compared to conventional top-loading machines.

Water-Smart Products and Techniques

The main water issues in the home are purification and conservation. Great strides have been made in both areas in recent years. One of the more interesting advances is permeable pavement, which is especially effective at helping filter chemicals that leak from cars parked in the driveway. Here are more examples.



[25 Things to Know: Healthy Homes](#)

- **Drought-tolerant plants** reduce the amount of time and money you'll spend on irrigation.
- **Xeriscaping** challenges the assumption that grass should always be the dominant design element of a yard and lets the climate determine what makes the most sense.
- **Water-efficient appliances** such as front-loading washing machines have attracted great consumer interest, and low-flow showerheads and toilets have been mandated by law.
- **Water purification** devices that use carbon to remove contaminants and reverse osmosis systems are effective in the home.
- **Permeable pavement** lets rainwater seep through, which reduces runoff and allows the soil underneath to act as a natural filter.